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Anna Bonifazi, Homer's Versicolored Fabric. The Evocative Power of Ancient Greek Epic Word-Making.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Anna Bonifazi, *Homer's Versicolored Fabric. The Evocative Power of Ancient Greek Epic Word-Making*. Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2012. Distributed by Harvard University Press. Pp. 350. Paper (ISBN 978-0-674-06062-3) $24.95.

This is a linguistic study of αὐτός and related words in epic, particularly the *Odyssey* but also the *Iliad*. Bonifazi considers first how αὐτός and ἐκεῖνος are contrasted when they refer to Odysseus, then how all the various αὐ- words are similar. Her main tool is pragmatics, building on work by many scholars on discourse grammar in both Greek and Latin. Because she goes through a lot of basic background in this area of linguistics, with a copious bibliography, 25 pages, the book seems accessible to non-linguist classicists, though this is not really an introduction to pragmatics. In the introduction, Bonifazi says that "the general aim of this work is to contribute to an update of the grammatical accounts of some words in accord with notions and concepts from contemporary linguistics that are applicable to Homer" (10), observing that this kind of study adds precision to our understanding of pronouns, particles, and similar words, and that attention to the dialogue context can "shed more light on the standpoint of either the author or the internal characters" (11). This is all true and useful, and although there is much here I disagree with, there are also valuable observations in the book.

The first three chapters, slightly more than half of the text, are given to a close reading of uses of the two pronouns αὐτός and ἐκεῖνος in the *Odyssey*. Our elementary textbooks teach us that αὐτός is the ordinary pronoun, except when it means "self" or "same," while ἐκεῖνος means "that" and refers to something far away. Bonifazi argues that ἐκεῖνος, or its more usual Homeric form κεῖνος, in *Od.* 1–4 usually refers to Odysseus himself. He is not part of the action in these four books, but "is a kind of common cognitive landmark for the people that act in Ithaca during his physical absence" (40): this pronoun shows how Odysseus is never far from mind. Bonifazi provides charts showing that Odysseus is referred to with (ἐ)κεῖνος more often than with αὐτός in the first four books, (29 (ἐ)κεῖνος to 6 αὐτός), but in the last twenty more often with αὐτός (30 to 116). She suggests that (ἐ)κεῖνος basically means "that one who is now becoming a relevant piece of information" (67), and in different contexts this relevance could be positive, showing

veneration, or negative, indicating social distancing.

As for αὐτός, this pronoun normally refers to someone, or some thing, already present in the discourse, but makes its referent more conspicuous, singling him out as the center of attention and marking recognition of his true identity (135). Bonifazi points out that this pronoun in attribute position, for example, ὁ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος, "the same man," is uncommon in Homeric Greek (136). In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus becomes αὐτός once he appears in the poem. Bonifazi argues that the difference between ἐκεῖνος and αὐτός corresponds to characters' sense of who Odysseus is, and in particular indicates whether and when Ithacan characters recognize him in disguise in the second half of the poem.

The pragmatic reading of these two pronouns is useful and, in strictly linguistic terms, correct. Bonifazi pushes the literary implications of this reading rather far, however, particularly in her second chapter, a detailed study of the meeting between Odysseus in disguise and his loyal swineherd Eumaeus in book 14. This book is sometimes considered a problem: why do Odysseus and Eumaeus spend so much time together before Odysseus reveals himself?-Bonifazi suggests that this book is to be read on multiple levels or layers. At the surface, this is a discussion between a beggar and a swineherd; the next layer shows us "a disguised master who visits his loyal swineherd, who recognizes his master"; the deepest layer reveals "the performance of some rituals concerning Odysseus' hero cult, involving a representative worshipper and Odysseus, or else another cult hero and Odysseus" (82). The first layer is clear enough, of course. Since we, the external audience, know that the beggar is the swineherd's master in disguise, we perceive some dramatic irony whenever Eumaeus refers to his master, often with κεῖνος, as Bonifazi points out. The difficulty with Bonifazi's second layer is her suggestion that Eumaeus recognizes Odysseus, and indeed that Odysseus is subtly revealing his identity even before he explicitly does so. How this happens is apparently all a matter of pronouns. For example, when Odysseus first addresses Eumaeus at lines 115–20, he asks about the swineherd's master using ὥδε, "such a man," a pronoun that typically refers to "the zero-point of utterance," that is, the speaker or what is present to him; "thus ὥδε at xiv 116 might deictically point at the rich and powerful man who is before Eumaeus" (85). In other words, according to Bonifazi, this very pronoun should be read as identifying the rich and powerful person in the question, Eumaeus' master, with the here-and-now person asking the question, the disguised Odysseus. Moreover, when Eumaeus uses the same pronoun twenty lines later, he is said to be

picking up on this clue. Bonifazi piles up further examples of pronouns in the speeches of both characters that, she claims, suggest the second-layer reading.

In the third layer, Eumaeus not only recognizes Odysseus, but worships him as a hero, a dead hero who receives prayer and sacrifice. Here Bonifazi notes several unusual words in the passage and argues that they are all more at home in the context of hero-cult and sacrifice than in the context of a swineherd entertaining a stranger. For example, the meal they share is called δόρπος (14.407), a word that can mean the usual evening meal elsewhere in epic, but can also refer to a sacrifice, a funerary meal, or certain public festivals (104–105). In the first ten lines of the book, Eumaeus' dwelling or its front yard is called an αὐλή, ornamented with wild pear, ἄχερδος. This is a rare word, only here in the *Odyssey*, never in the *Iliad*. Bonifazi observes that it occurs in funerary contexts in Hipponax and Theocritus, and at the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* in the messenger speech telling of the end of Oedipus. Following Jebb in his commentary on that play, she suggests that the pear tree is connected with the myth of Persephone; following Calame, she notes a connection between the Sophoclean passage and the cult of Demeter at Eleusis. She therefore postulates a connection between Eumaeus' wild pear and Odysseus' hero cult (111).

All of this, especially the third layer, is much too clever. Moreover, as Bonifazi herself admits, this reading "is beyond plot consistency" (120); on her reading, neither the ostensible plot of the poem nor the characters of Penelope, Eumaeus, or even Odysseus himself will be internally consistent. Indeed, she is happy to "dismantle a unitary notion of character in favor of the poetic strategies the performer exploits for his own performative and literary purposes" (169). In other words, the poem does not have to make sense so long as the performance does. This is unsatisfactory: though of course there is more to epic than its plot, what is the point of narrative epic if it does not, at least, have a consistent narrative?

The second part of the book, consisting of two chapters, concerns the adverbs and discourse markers that start with αὐ-, including αὖ, αὖτε, αὐτάρ, and so on. Bonifazi claims they are all related to each other and to the pronoun αὐτός, as if the αὐ- were a morpheme (186). The etymology is complex and disputed; there may be at least two Proto-Indo-European adverbs that stand behind some or all of these words, and this may account for the rather different senses the αὐ- words have in the attested languages (211). Although Bonifazi dutifully sets out what is known about the derivation of these words, she then insists that the words are related, and

that their nearly opposite meanings, "continuative" and "separating,""are not contradictory" (260) because in fact all these words actually do is "identify topics and individuals about whom something new is going to be introduced" (260), much as αὐτός itself does. In fact, the possible etymological relationship is irrelevant to Bonifazi's main argument and could have been omitted. The weak conclusion that these words are discourse markers, with more functional than lexical meaning, is not really a surprise. The discussion of these words as Wackernagel-type clitics is also rather confused. These two chapters add little to our sense of this group of words.

The readings of particular passages are sometimes useful, and the distinction Bonifazi finds between Odysseus as αὐτός and as ἐκεῖνος does show us something new about the text. On the whole, though, the book is not well argued. Certainly discourse is a major area in Greek linguistics, but the present book is not the strongest recent contribution in this subfield.

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Matthew Wright, *The Comedian as Critic. Greek Old Comedy and Poetics.* London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012. Pp. xi + 238. Cloth (ISBN 978-1-780-93029-9) $120.00.

Wright argues that the works of Old Comedy allow us to form a reasonable sense of the literary taste of educated Athenians capable of appreciating their complex intertextual productions. As such, comedy on this view represents the best source for Greek literary criticism before Plato and Aristotle. As one might expect, Aristophanes is made to do much of the heavy lifting in such a study, but Wright shows an impressive familiarity with the fragments of Aristophanes and his rivals. The result is a study that is dense and demanding, but leavened by Wright's clear writing and full of important insights into the mentalities and techniques of comic poetics.

Central to the elaboration of the book's general thesis are a number of claims about the historicity of comic representations, discussed in the first chapter but reiterated often. Although the plays make numerous autobiographical references and direct claims about the lives of other writers, Wright correctly distrusts them as potentially ironical: "*Everything* in comedy, including anything that seems to be an authorial claim or a programmatic statement, is to be imagined as being inside 'quotation marks'" (10, emphasis